DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 335 RC 020 073

AUTHOR Lockett, Benny L.
TITLE Attitudes of Small Farmers As 1995 Farm Bill Stakeholders.
PUB DATE Jan 95
NOTE 9p.; In: Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies, 1994. National Public Policy Education Conference; see RC 020 070.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agriculture; Extension Education; *Farmers; Farm Management; Federal Programs; *Government Role; Needs Assessment; *Program Attitudes; *Public Affairs Education; *Rural Development
IDENTIFIERS *Agricultural Policy; Environmental Issues

ABSTRACT

To design public issues education programs to meet the needs of small farmers, the Cooperative Extension programs at Prairie View A&M University (Texas) and nine other 1890 land grant institutions surveyed small farmers' opinions concerning the 1995 farm bill. Responses were received from 644 farmers in the states in which these institutions are located (primarily in the South). Objectives were to assess preferences and attitudes concerning the future of agricultural and food policies, to enable state extension services to improve their public issues education programs, and to enable states to provide input to congressional representatives. A small farm was defined as one that has less than $40,000 in gross farm sales. Of 644 farmers surveyed, 61 percent had incomes below $40,000 and 87 percent had incomes less than $100,000. More than half the sample participated in at least one farm program, the largest being the disaster program (28 percent). A permanent program for losses exceeding 50 percent was favored. Farmers also favored governmental involvement in regulating and protecting water quality. Expansion of the public education system was viewed as the single most important factor for improving rural development. The USDA food pyramid was familiar to 46 percent of respondents, possibly indicating the success of educational programs concerning nutrition, diet, and health. (JAT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 335

ATTITUDES OF SMALL FARMERS AS 1995 FARM BILL STAKEHOLDERS

Benny L. Lockett
Prairie View A&M University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

STEVE A. HALBROOK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC020073

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ATTITUDES OF SMALL FARMERS AS 1995 FARM BILL STAKEHOLDERS

Benny L. Lockett
Prairie View A&M University

The Cooperative Extension Programs at Prairie View A&M University and other 1890 land grant institutions recognize that in order to properly design public issues education programs to meet the needs of small and limited resource farmers, they must identify the issues and concerns facing these farmers. Determining the opinions and preferences of small farmers concerning the future of agriculture and food policy as they pertain to the 1995 farm bill is of particular interest to extension educators. Empowered with the knowledge of how these public issues are viewed by small farmers in states representing various geographical regions, input on planning programs and legislation can be made to policymakers at the local, state and national levels.

Prior to the initiation of this study, Fred Woods, Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), advised me that a significant number of 1862 land grant universities were surveying large commercial farmers concerning their preferences on the 1995 farm bill. Surveying small farmers from some of the same states to obtain data on their preferences also was of distinct interest.

Of the sixteen 1890 land grant institutions invited to participate in this survey, the following nine institutions agreed to take part:

1. Prairie View A&M University—Prairie View, Texas
2. University of Arkansas—Pine Bluff, Arkansas
3. Florida A&M University—Tallahassee, Florida
4. Tennessee State University—Nashville, Tennessee
5. South Carolina State College-Orangeburg, South Carolina
6. University of Maryland-Eastern Shore—Princess Anne, Maryland
7. Virginia State University—Petersburg, Virginia
8. Fort Valley State College—Fort Valley, Georgia
9. Alabama A&M University—Normal, Alabama

Objectives

The Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University, in cooperation with other 1890 land grant institutions, conducted a survey to determine small-farm agricultural producer opinions and preferences concerning the future of food and agriculture

RC020073

policy as they pertain to 1995 farm bill issues. The survey plan consisted of sampling one hundred small farmers in each of the states in which 1890 institutions were located with the following objectives:

1. To obtain a broad assessment of preferences and attitudes of small farmers to serve as a basis for input on the 1995 farm bill.
2. To enable state extension services to improve their public issues education programs to meet the needs of their small farm clientele.
3. To enable states to provide input to elected congressional representatives regarding the policy preferences of the small farmers.

Procedures

Support was solicited and obtained from the 1890 extension administrators for the conduct of this survey during their annual conference. Defining what constitutes a small farm has been addressed many times in current literature. For example, James Lewis uncovered more than forty references to small farms. To attempt to cite a variety of different definitions of small farms is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, the one-dimensional definition used in this study identifies a small farm as one that has annual gross farm sales of less than $40,000.

The starting point for this survey was the instrument developed at the University of Illinois and Purdue University for use by the 1862 universities. Questions selected related most specifically to small farmers. Lawrence Lippke and Ronald Knutson, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, agreed to provide assistance throughout the preparation, conduct and analysis of the small farmer survey.

Mailed surveys were sent to sixteen 1890 land grant institutions requesting that each conduct interviews of one hundred small farmers. Survey instruments were collected by nine 1890 representatives and forwarded to the Project Director. Survey instruments were processed by Data Processing, Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Survey data were analyzed by representatives of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University.

Survey Results

Nine of sixteen land grant institutions responded to the request for conduct of small farmer surveys in their states. A total of 644 responses were received.

More than 61 percent of the farmers surveyed indicated their gross farm income was under $40,000 (Table 1). This indicates very clearly that the vast majority of farmers being assisted by these 1890

land grant institutions are small farmers. Table 1 also indicates that 90 percent of the sample had off-farm income of less than $40,000 and 87 percent had gross sales of less than $100,000. This confirms that the majority of clientele served are limited-resource, small farmers.

The sample distribution, in descending order of sales, was as indicated in Table 2. The most important source of cash receipts for farmers is livestock (24 percent). This is especially true in Texas where a recent survey indicates that more than 81 percent of farm borrowers with the Farmers Home Administration special project

Table 1. Sample Sales and Income Demographics

	Income	Percent of Sample
Gross Sales	Under $40,000	61
	$40,000-$99,999	26
	$100,000-$249,999	10
	$250,000-$499,999	3
	$500,000 and Over	0
Off-Farm Income	Under $10,000	36
	$10,000-$19,999	30
	$20,000-$39,999	25
	$40,000 and over	9

Table 2. Sample Distribution

	Percent of Sample
Most Important Source of Cash Receipts (1993)	
Livestock	24
Other (Hay, etc.)	23
Fruits and Vegetables	18
Mixed Grain and Livestock	14
Grain	13
Cotton	1
Dairy	1
Program Participation (1993)	
Disaster	28
Feed Grain	17
Wheat	12
CRP	12
Cotton	9
Wool	2
Rice	1
WOR	1
At Least One Program	55

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

were beef cattle producers. Livestock producer respondents followed closely by a miscellaneous group called "other" which included hay (23 percent).

More than half of the sample (55 percent) participated in at least one farm program. The largest government program these farmers participated in was the disaster program (28 percent), a firm indication that disaster programs are very important to the small farmers. Percentages of other program-participating respondents were feed grain (17 percent), wheat (12 percent), Conservation Reserve Program (12 percent), and cotton (9 percent).

In Table 3, 61 percent of respondents representing a majority in eight of nine states wanted to keep current programs involving price supports, income supports, and set-asides. Seventeen percent of respondents wanted to eliminate all commodity programs, including set-aside, price support and deficiency payments.

A plurality of these respondents (48 percent) indicated that if spending cuts were made in commodity programs, payments should be made to only small and medium-sized farms (Table 4). Thirty percent chose to reduce the number of payment acres. Very few respondents (22 percent) wanted a reduction in target prices and deficiency payments. The combination of Tables 3 and 4 indicate that most small farmers do not want to change government programs.

Table 5 indicates a mixed reaction from respondents about how the government should protect them from disaster such as floods and droughts. The larger group (35 percent) felt government should develop a permanent disaster program for losses that exceed 50 percent and encourage the farmers to buy additional protection by

Table 3. Preferred Farm Policy Approach for 1995 Farm Bill

	Percent	Number of States Preferring
Keep Program	61	8
Mandatory Controls	12	0
Decoupling	10	0
Eliminate	17	1

Table 4. Preferred Spending Cuts

	Percent	Number of Respondents Preferring
Reduce Target Prices	22	0
Reduce Payment Acres	30	3
Pay Only Small and Medium-Sized Farmers	48	6

using private crop insurance. Thirty percent felt Congress should decide each year who should receive disaster payments.

Table 6 displays strong views of small farmers regarding the role of government in dealing with environmental problems. This figure indicates clear preferences for governmental involvement in regulating and protecting water quality. However, it also shows that farmers want to be compensated for financial losses as a result of these regulations.

No clear preference was indicated by respondents asked, "Should cash be given to recipients in place of food stamps?" An equal number of states (3) agreed and disagreed with this proposal while 18 percent of respondents were unsure.

The majority of respondents (83 percent) felt the federal government should increase funding to expand employment and economic

Table 5. Preferred Role of Government in Disaster Protection

	Percent	Number of States Preferring
Congress Decides Who Gets Payments Each Year	30	3
Develop Permanent Disaster Program	35	5
Mandatory Crop Insurance	20	0
Private Insurance	15	1

Table 6. Preferred Role of Government in Dealing with Environmental Problems

	Percent Agree	Number of States Preferring
Regulate Water Quality Practices	62	9
Plant Filter Strips	66	8
Compensate for Filter Strips	83	9
Compensate for Property Value Loss	91	9

Table 7. Opinions on Cash Replacing Food Stamps

	Percent	Number of States
Strongly Agree	10	0
Agree	31	3
Not Sure	18	1
Disagree	23	3
Strongly Disagree	18	2

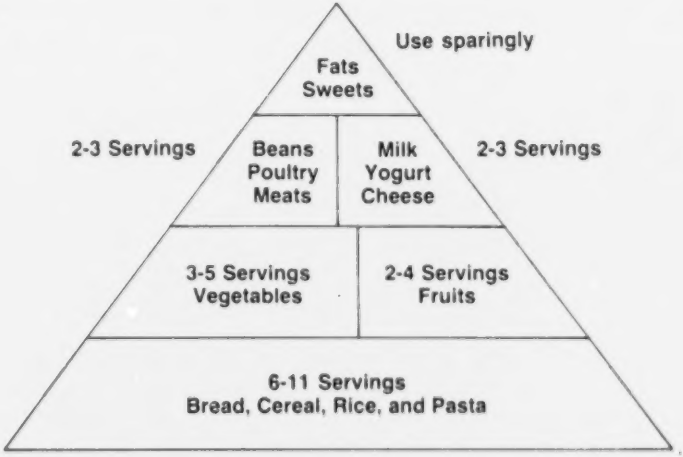
activities in rural areas. Expansion and enhancement of the public education system is viewed by small-farmer respondents as the single most important factor for improving rural area development. Education was identified as the most important need, being selected as one of the top three needs by 65 percent of respondents Table 8. This was followed by health care (46 percent), law enforcement and business development (40 percent), and workers skills (39 percent).

The food pyramid has become the symbol for a new approach to nutrition education (Figure 1). A significant number of respondents (46 percent) indicated a familiarity with the USDA food pyramid

Table 8. Need for Expanded Rural Development Funding

Most Important Needs	Percent Selecting as One of Top Needs	States' Top Priority
Education	65	8
Health Care	46	
Law Enforcement	40	1
Business Development	40	
Workers' Skills	39	
Roads	27	
Bridges	11	
Sewage	7	

Figure 1. The Food Pyramid



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Table 9. Attitudes Toward Food Pyramid

	Percent	Number of States
Familiar with Food Pyramid	46	6
Find Food Pyramid Useful	90	9

(Table 9). From this group ninety percent found it useful. This is an indication that educational programs regarding nutrition, diet and health are reaching limited-resource farm families and are having a positive influence on their lives.

Conclusions

- Limited-resource, small farmers are supportive of current farm programs. Most would like to keep present programs.
- The majority of the survey respondents are concerned about the environment and support governmental regulations. However, they want to be compensated for losses incurred as a result of these regulations.
- Respondents support disaster programs offered by the government. They would like to see a permanent program for losses exceeding 50 percent while encouraging farmers to purchase supplemental private insurance.
- Reactions were evenly balanced about whether recipients of food stamps should be given cash.
- Limited-resource, small farmers expressed a strong need for rural development with the area of greatest need identified as rural public education.
- Forty-six percent of respondents were familiar with the USDA food pyramid, possibly indicating the success of educational programs concerning nutrition, diet and health.

REFERENCES

Lewis, James A. "Implications of Definitions of Small Farms." *Toward a Federal Small Farm Policy. Phase I. Barriers to Increasing On-Farm Income*. Washington, DC: USDA NCR Rep. 9, 1978.

Southern Rural Development Center. *Formulation of Alternative Approaches for Maintaining and Enhancing Small-Scale Producers' Roles in Southern Agriculture Through On- and Off-Farm Initiatives*. Mississippi State, MS, Jan. 1990.

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Sciences. *Home and Garden Bulletin #262*. Hyattesville, MD, Aug. 1992.